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ABSTRACT

In Pennsylvania where 30 percent of the adult population is functionally illiterate and another 24 percent has only marginal competence, no state funds are appropriated for adult basic education and general educational development (ABE/GED) programs. All programs are supported by federal aid. Information shows that economic revitalization and a reduction in welfare rolls is linked to existing ABE/GED programs. An investment in ABE/GED is one part of the solution to Pennsylvania's economic and social problems. A proposed funding model for ABE/GED programs is predicated on the current federal funding base. Allocation of funds is linked to the removal of students from the public welfare rolls. For the first 2 years, state support should equal welfare dollars saved during the previous year as a result of ABE/GED programs. Funding for subsequent years would be based on the number of individuals who were welfare recipients and ABE/GED students simultaneously and who gained employment during the year following program completion. The Department of Education would administer the state allocation. Grants to local projects would be awarded on the basis of potential (1) reduction or prevention of welfare payments, (2) improvement of the labor pool and diversification of the economic base, and (3) integration of other funds and services. (YLB)

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Adult Basic Education and the Welfare Roles:

An Economic and Social Alternative

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PREFACE

This paper presents some shocking statistics about adult literacy in Pennsylvania. Thirty percent of Pennsylvania's adult population is functionally illiterate; another 24 percent has only marginal competence. Yet financial support from the Commonwealth to alleviate the problem is nonexistent. Pennsylvania ranks dead last among the 50 states in financial support of adult basic education and general education development, two programs that work to give adults a second chance. The only funds available to support the programs are from the Federal government, and they are being reduced.

This paper also presents information that links economic revitalization of Pennsylvania and a reduction in welfare rolls to the adult basic education and general education development programs that do exist. It suggests that investment in adult basic education and general education development is one part of the solution to Pennsylvania's economic and social problems.

The Pennsylvania Association for Adult Continuing Education (PAACE) believes that Pennsylvania must address the issue of state funding of adult basic education and general education development. Thus PAACE, many of whose members have long worked in the field of adult basic education, has developed this report for public policymakers and other interested citizens. Prepared by a committee of PAACE members, Judith Cope and Galen Godbey, chairmen, in cooperation with the Pennsylvania Department of Education, it provides information on the past and a recommendation for the future.

Marlowe Froke
President, PAACE
December, 1981

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INTRODUCTION

Economic revitalization of Pennsylvania is a primary concern today, with welfare reform and job development emerging as key issues of the 1980s (7). There is no panacea for our economic ills—these problems can only be solved by applying a variety of strategies in a systematic fashion. *Adult basic education and general educational development (ABE/GED) programs represent one workable approach to reducing welfare dependency and increasing citizen employability;* they are not the entire answer, but they are part of the solution. Yet many Pennsylvanians have never heard of adult basic or secondary education, and state financial support is currently nonexistent in our Commonwealth.

This paper was developed to address this situation by:

- providing background information about ABE/GED
- documenting the need for ABE/GED in Pennsylvania
- proposing a funding formula to establish state financial support for ABE/GED.

In the past, an educational policy focused on children and young adults served the Commonwealth well. However, several factors now indicate that the educational needs of adults need attention.

> Pennsylvania has the *third oldest population* in the nation, with a median age of 32.1 (26).
>
> Pennsylvania has experienced an out-migration of young, well-educated workers, leaving a *disproportionate number of older, less educated* individuals who may need skill-building programs (27).
>
> Pennsylvania's *economy is shifting* from reliance on basic industries to increasing dependence upon services and technologies. Economic diversification will require a substantially better educated labor pool than now exists (11).

These factors suggest that ABE/GED programs, aimed directly at undereducated adults, should play an increasingly important role in the future.

The remainder of this paper (1) describes Pennsylvania's current ABE/GED program, (2) documents the need for increased services, and (3) proposes a model for providing additional funding at the state level.

CURRENT PROGRAM

ABE/GED programs provide basic and secondary education to adults who either lack a high school diploma or speak limited English. The allocation of federal funds to Pennsylvania is based on our population of 3.5 million adults (age 16 or older) who have not completed their high school education (17). Pennsylvania ranks third in the nation in number of people without a high school diploma.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education, guided by citizen advisory groups, administers the statewide program. Funds to conduct local programs are allocated on a competitive grant basis to private and public agencies. (Current service providers include local education agencies, intermediate units, community-based organizations, hospitals, two- and four-year colleges, public libraries, correctional/penal institutions, labor unions, and senior centers.)

In 1979-80, 243 ABE/GED programs operated at a variety of sites during the day and/or in the evening. Eight adult learning centers in the Commonwealth maintained extended hours to provide maximum accessibility for students. Twenty-nine thousand students, or approximately 1 percent of the eligible population, participated in programs (13), but at the same time another 31,000 young adults dropped out of secondary school, preventing any net gains (23).

How does Pennsylvania compare to other states in our support of ABE/GED? We rank fiftieth in the nation—dead last—in our support of these programs. The legislatures of a number of states, such as California and New York, consistently provide strong support for adult basic education, and even in states traditionally ranked low in expenditures for eduation, such as Louisiana and Alabama, legislators have given increasing support to the adult learning needs of their citizens. Some states, including Illinois and Connecticut, have laws confirming basic education as a right for all citizens (21). At present, *no state funds are appropriated in Pennsylvania for ABE/GED programs; all of our programs are now being supported by federal dollars.* Recent trends in federal support for education are not encouraging, so that the $5.6 million currently coming into Pennsylvania for this purpose cannot be considered assured for the future.

DOCUMENTATION OF NEED

In Pennsylvania, as across the nation, our resources are limited, and the economic reality of the day forces us to seek new ways of using them wisely. An investment in the education of the Commonwealth's undereducated adults is needed and yields a high return.

—*ABE/GED programs have proven effective in reducing the amount of the Commonwealth's general fund budget spent for welfare and other support payments.*

In 1980, 2,823 ABE/GED students were reported as removed from public assistance (13). With the current cost of maintaining one adult on public welfare per year approximately $2,000, the Commonwealth saved approximately $5.5 million in welfare payments alone (2).

—*Pennsylvania's illiteracy rate is substantially higher than the national average.*

An assessment of functional competency in Pennsylvania revealed that 30 percent of the state's general adult population does not possess the skills and knowledge essential to cope with the demands of daily living. An additional 24 percent of the population functions with only marginal competence (24).

—*AGE/GED programs contribute to a skilled labor force, which in turn attracts business and industry to Pennsylvania.*

Advances in technology require a labor force with skills at least equivalent to those reflected in the attainment of a high school diploma, but increasingly businesses and industries are finding that employees lack these skills (3). ABE/GED programs have upgraded the labor force by providing remedial programs for business and industry employees and by increasing the employability of potential workers. Although ABE/GED programs focus primarily on basic skills and high school equivalency, many programs also provide career counseling and/or job search skills. In addition, numerous cooperative arrangements have been established with other organizations and programs including the Bureau of Employment Security, vocational education, and local businesses and industries (15). (Appendix II includes a complete list.)

—*Pennsylvania has the largest rural population in the nation, a sizable percentage of which is educationally disadvantaged.*

Two-thirds of the Commonwealth is classified by the federal government as Appalachian territory (4), yet we have paid inadequate attention to the educational needs of rural adult Pennsylvanians. The assessment of functional competency in Pennsylvania revealed that the highly rural northern region of the Commonwealth has an even higher percentage of adults functioning with limited effectiveness (36.1%) than the other regions (24). In regions not included in any of Pennsylvania's Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas, more than 650,000 adults were found eligible for ABE/GED programs (25).

—*ABE/GED programs provide an almost immediate financial and social return on investment.*

Costs per ABE/GED student are budgeted at approximately $350, a modest level of expense when compared with costs of

elementary and secondary school students. Because their duration is short and they provide skills and credentials necessary for employment, ABE/GED programs offer visible returns on our investments (2). Economic returns are almost immediate (2), and they include students obtaining jobs or earning higher pay. Program statistics from 1979-80 indicated that 2,387 students obtained jobs and 1,087 received raises or better jobs (13). Income generated from these jobs was estimated to be approximately $18.5 million using the current minimum wage as the basis for calculations (2). The tax revenues generated benefit all Pennsylvanians.

Non-monetary returns on the investment in adult learning are also substantial. For example, a recent evaluation of Pennsylvania's program reported that 90 percent of the former participants surveyed said they "think better of themselves" (15). (Appendix III contains a list of students' perceptions of help received from ABE/GED programs.)

--*ABE/GED Progams have been instrumental in the education of immigrants.*

The Public School Code of 1949 (Article XIX, Section 1901, 2a) requires educational opportunities for adult immigrants, and ABE/GED programs consistently have provided these opportunities. In 1979-80, 3,778 immigrants learned to speak, read, and write English in Pennsylvania ABE programs (13).

--*Literate parents are likely to foster positive attitudes toward learning and work in their children.*

The Pennsylvania Quality Assessment data indicate that parent education, income, and occupation have significant influence on children's interest in school, learning and career development (14). Therefore, adult education can contribute to breaking the cycle of poverty and ignorance which is associated with chronic family dependence on public welfare programs.

--*ABE/GED programs help prison inmates acquire high school diplomas.*

A recent review of prison inmates' records indicates that approximately 68 percent of the institutional population is functioning below the 8th grade level (5). The average reading level of inmates of Pennsylvania State Correctional Institutions is between 4th and 5th grade, and the average math level is between the 3rd and 4th grade (1). ABE/GED programs are well established in each of the Commonwealth's nine State Correctional Institutions and in a number of county prisons. In 1979-80, the programs enrolled a total of 4,195 incarcerated adults (13).

A FUNDING MODEL FOR ABE/GED PROGRAMS

As indicated, a program of state financial support of adult basic education and high school equivalency degree programs would be a sound investment for the Commonwealth at this time. PAACE proposes that state funding be determined by the funding model presented in the following section. Procedures for administering the state allocation and awarding grants to local projects also are described. This funding proposal is predicated on the current 5.6 million dollar federal funding base. State support is not intended to replace existing federal funding.

Model

The proposed model for ABE/GED support links allocation of funds to the removal of students from the public welfare rolls. For the first two years of funding, state support should equal welfare dollars saved during the previous fiscal year as a result of ABE/GED programs. Specifically, the number of ABE/GED students removed from the welfare rolls (as certified jointly by the Departments of Education and Welfare) would be multiplied by the current state average annual expenditure for a welfare recipient.[1]

For the first two years, the Departments of Education and Welfare together would determine the number of welfare recipients removed from the public

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[1]Current research data demonstrate that ABE/GED program participation is effective in *removing people from the welfare rolls,* but the type of data collected currently do not document a link between these programs and *increased employment.* Two years will be required for the Departments of Education and Welfare to collect data on the relationship between ABE/GED programs and employment. During the first year, students would participate in these educational programs; during the second year these students' records in the job market would be documented. Funding for the third year then would be determined on the basis of the successful employment of first-year funding cycle students. Therefore, by the third year of state funding, the transition from a model rewarding ABE/GED programs for associated reductions in the welfare rolls to a model rewarding ABE/GED programs for associated employment gains could be completed.

assistance rolls who gained employment following their participation in ABE/GED programs. Funding for this program subsequent to the second year would be based on the number of individuals who were welfare recipients and ABE/GED students simultaneously, and who gained employment during the year following program completion.

Administration of State Allocation

Funds would be appropriated to the Pennsylvania Department of Education, which would use no more than 3 percent of the total appropriation for administrative purposes. This Department would distribute funds in response to competing grant proposals from prospective service providers including, but not limited to, local education agencies, intermediate units, two- and four-year colleges and universities, public libraries, correctional/penal institutions, labor unions, and community-based organizations. The Department of Welfare would be represented on the grant award committee, and at least 40 percent of the persons enrolled in such programs across the state would have been eligible for public assistance or federal aid at some time. No state funds would be granted to programs run by profit-making educational organizations. All programs funded by the Commonwealth would devote no less than 1 percent, or more than 5 percent, to promoting public awareness of the program.

Grant Criteria

Grants would be awarded on the basis of a proposal's potential for (1) reducing or preventing state welfare payments, (2) improving a community's or locale's capacity to strengthen its labor pool and diversify its economic base; (3) successfully integrating other federal, state, and local government funds and services for the population to be served by ABE/GED programs; and (4) such other criteria as may be prescribed by the Secretary of Education.

CONCLUSION

ABE/GED programs offer benefits which can contribute significantly to revitalizing our Commonwealth's economy. The vast majority of participants improve basic skills. Many attain a high school diploma, while others become eligible for vocational training; both enhance students' prospects for employment. Adult basic education is an economic necessity and social imperative for a state facing an uncertain future.

APPENDIX I
DEFINITIONS

Adult Basic Education (ABE). Any purposeful effort toward self-development in the basic skills of communication, computation, health, consumer development, and citizenship carried on by an adult who is generally classified as functionally illiterate or undereducated. (National Advisory Council on Adult Education, July 1980).

Adult Basic Education (ABE). Adult education for adults whose inability to speak, read or write the English language constitutes a substantial impairment of their ability to get or retain employment commensurate with their real ability, which is designed to help eliminate such inability and raise the level of education of such individuals with a view to making them less likely to become dependent on others, to improving their ability to benefit from occupational training and otherwise increasing their opportunities for more productive and profitable employment and to making them better able to meet their adult responsibilities. (The Adult Education Act — P.L. 95-561).

Adult Learner. An adult who is enrolled in any course of study, whether special or regular, to develop new skills or qualifications or improve existing skills and qualifications. (National Advisory Council on Adult Education, July 1980).

Adult Performance Level (APL). A research project funded by the U.S. Office of Education under the direction of Norvell Northcutt. The project defined 65 requirements for functional literacy. The APL project developed a process for testing functional competencies which classifies adults into one of three categories:

APL 1 – Those adults who function only with difficulty because of their unsatisfactory mastery of requirements for functional literacy.
APL 2 – Those adults who are functional, but not proficient.
APL 3 – Those adults who are proficient. (Parker, 1980)

Competency. The requisite ability to perform a specific task or quality for a specific role; a functional qualification as opposed to a credential-based qualification. (National Advisory Council on Adult Education, July 1980).

Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA). A recently enacted piece of legislation that has an impact on nearly every American community. The rationale behind CETA is that local labor markets differ in the degree of unemployment and the character of local institutions and in the composition of target population groups. Local communities are in a position to determine needs and to develop and administer manpower services and programs that are to solve local employment problems. CETA was reauthorized and extended in 1978. (Franklin, 1979)

Dropout. An individual who discontinues a course, program of study or educational endeavor before completing the scheduled period of the activity. (National Advisory Council on Adult Education, July 1980).

Functional Illiteracy. A quality attributed to an individual who lacks one, or a combination, of the basic skills necessary to communicate effectively in written or arithmetic forms. (National Advisory Council on Adult Education, July 1980).

General Educational Development Test. The GED Test is to provide a valid means of measuring the educational proficiency of these persons in comparison with high school graduates. Through achievement of satisfactory scores on a battery of GED Tests, adults may earn a high school diploma,qualify for admission to college or other training programs, meet educational requirements for employment or promotion, satisfy educational qualifications for induction into the Armed Forces of the United States, and meet education requisites of state and local licensing boards for admission to licensing examinations for those occupations requiring educational competence at grade levels less than high school graduation. Thus, the basic purpose of the GED Tests is to provide a second chance for adults who did not complete their formal secondary schooling. (Adapted from the National Advisory Council on Adult Education, July 1980).

National Advisory Council on Adult Education (NACAE). A fifteen-menber Presidentially appointed body established under the 1970 amendments to the Adult Education Act of 1966. The members serve for three-year terms, five members retiring, five new appointees joining the Council each year. The chairman and vice-chairman are elected from among the appointees and serve one year. (Cope, 1980).

APPENDIX II
ABE PROGRAM INVOLVEMENT WITH OTHER AGENCIES FOR SERVICES*

Agencies	EXTENT OF INVOLVEMENT Low #%	Average #%	High #%	Number of Responses
Public Education	1 (3)	8 (20)	31 (77)	40
Vocational Education	7 (19)	11 (31)	18 (50)	36
Special Adult Agencies	9 (30)	8 (27)	13 (43)	30
Other State and County Agencies	9 (24)	14 (38)	14 (38)	37
CETA	10 (27)	13 (35)	14 (38)	37
State and Local Employment Agencies	8 (23)	15 (43)	12 (34)	35
Churches	11 (33)	12 (36)	10 (31)	33
State and County Prisons	14 (38)	12 (32)	11 (30)	37
Libraries	15 (44)	11 (32)	8 (24)	34
Armed Forces	15 (48)	9 (29)	7 (23)	31
Business / Industry	12 (33)	19 (53)	5 (14)	36
Fraternal and Voluntary	14 (45)	13 (42)	4 (14)	31
Legislature	16 (57)	9 (32)	3 (11)	28
Labor Unions	24 (73)	6 (18)	3 (9)	33
Private Education	17 (61)	9 (32)	2 (7)	28

*Lewis, James P., et al. Statewide Evaluation of Adult Education Programs, 1980-81. Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania Department of Education, 1981.

Note: Percentages are based on the total number of programs sampled which indicated any involvement with the agencies listed.

APPENDIX III
STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF HELP RECEIVED FROM ABE PROGRAMS*

Has the Adult Education Program Helped you to . . .	Percent		
	Yes	No	Don't Know
Think Better of Yourself?	90	6	4
Read Better?	85	10	6
Work Better with Numbers?	84	9	6
Make New Friends?	83	10	7
Think Through Problems?	81	9	10
Write Better?	79	13	8
Continue Your Education on a Higher Level?	77	10	13
Feel Comfortable Speaking?	75	15	10
Get Along Better with Your Family & Friends?	60	23	17
Help Children with Homework?	60	31	9
Qualify for Training Programs?	56	25	19
Better Manage Money?	52	31	17
Obtain a GED?	49	27	24
Understand Government & Law?	49	32	19
Know More About Good Mental & Physical Health?	46	34	20
Other?	43	25	32
Know More About Community Services Including Transportation?	42	38	20
Get a Better Job or Salary Increase?	32	36	32
Get a Job?	30	38	32
Obtain Citizenship?	23	66	11
Obtain a Driver's License?	19	71	10

*Lewis, James P., et al. Statewide Evaluation of Adult Education Programs, 1980-81. Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania Department of Education, 1981.

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